

Series: Unlikely Encounters

At the Beach

John 21:4-14

Sermon by Lead Pastor Paul Joslin

Waterstone Community Church, Littleton, Colorado

Sunday morning, April 12, 2026

A reading from John 21, verses 4 through 14: “Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. He called out to them, ‘Friends, haven’t you any fish?’ ‘No,’ they answered. He said, ‘Throw your net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.’ When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, ‘It is the Lord.’ As soon as Peter heard him say, ‘It is the Lord,’ he wrapped his outer garment around him, for he had taken it off, and jumped into the water. The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards away. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there, with fish on it and some bread. Jesus said to them, ‘Bring some of the fish you have just caught.’ So, Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, ‘Come and have breakfast.’ None of the disciples dared ask Him, ‘Who are you?’ They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread, and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after He was raised from the dead,” the word of the Lord.

Paul: Dennis, actually, before you step off the stage, do you mind staying up here for a second? He did not know this was coming, but Dennis has served as one of our elders for the last eight years, and he actually transitioned off the elder board last December, partially because his time had run out, but he had also been going through some health issues at the time, but Dennis has been leading our Emmaus class. He has just been a foundation of our church in so many different ways for so many years, and we just wanted to take a moment to thank him. So would you please thank Dennis for all his service, all the things that he has done for our church? We appreciate you so much, and if it is okay, I would love to just take a moment and pray for you. Is that all right? All right, so if you would, please join me in prayer.

Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for Dennis. We thank you for his beautiful wife, Linda, and just, God, the heart that they have for you, for the church, the many ways that they have served the body of Christ over the years as global missionaries, as Sunday school teachers, as people who are investing in your kingdom. We thank you for his time on the elder board. We thank you for the ways that he just led in wisdom and with a heart that was tender towards your Spirit. God, we are so grateful for that time and for the gift that you have given us in him, and it is in Christ’s name we pray, amen.

All right, yeah, thank you. Awesome. Well, it is good to be with you today, and man, I have just been so excited all week about diving into this message with you. Today we are wrapping up our final sermon in the Unlikely Encounters series. Next week we are going to be stepping into a new series called Restless, finding rest in a world that will not slow down. How many of you feel like the world is going too fast and you need a little rest? We are going to be looking at that over the course of the next five weeks, but today we are finishing with one last encounter of Jesus in an unlikely place with an unlikely person.

Now before we get into that, I just have a quick question for you. How many of you, you do not have to raise your hands, I'll raise my hand for all of us, but how many of you have ever had a moment that you wish you could take back? Right? Okay, we got some hands up too. Yeah, all right, those moments, the ones that you just like play over in your mind when you are trying to fall asleep at night. Or maybe you're in the shower and you're just like not thinking about anything and suddenly just like, boom, it hits you and you're like, oh my gosh, I can't believe I did that. Those moments, right? I had one of those recently where I just, I would have given anything to go back and undo what I had done. I shaved my beard a couple weeks ago, and if some of you remember that, guys, if you want to test unconditional love from your family or friends, just change your facial hair a little bit, because my wife looked at me like I was a stranger, and she did not know who I was who just walked into her house. My son looked at me like he wasn't quite sure if he loved me anymore, and I've already told you about my daughter. She told me I was not allowed to be her father anymore. "Daddy, you cannot be my daddy until you get your beard back." That took about four or five days, and finally she told me, "Okay, daddy, you can be my daddy again." So that was good, and she did make me promise that I would never shave again as long as she lived in my house. Which feels like a weird condition, but you know what? She runs the show.

So that's the reality, right? Is that there are sometimes that we make changes, we do a certain thing, people respond to us in a certain way, and we just immediately regret and wish we had done it, and there are some decisions, right? They make you stronger, they make you wiser, and then there are those decisions that make you Google average beard growth rate per week, right? That is where I was, but those are not really the decisions that I am talking about. You know the moments that I am talking about. The moments where you have done something that you desperately wish you could go back in time and undo. The moments that just live rent-free in your head, that have taught you that there's something wrong with you or that maybe you went too far. It is the moment where there was some line in the sand that you said you would never cross, and then you did. It is the moment where you reacted to your children in anger, and you saw fear in their eyes, and you knew it was because of you. It is the moment where you maybe drank too much or used too much and the night spiraled out of control, and the next morning you couldn't remember what happened. It is the moments when you looked at somebody that wasn't your spouse and you let your heart or your mind or your soul wander further than it should. The moment where you woke up with someone who maybe wasn't your spouse, and you weren't sure how you'd gotten there.

We all have those moments, right? Those moments where we had the habit that we swore we would never go back to and then we did. That moment where we lost control. We crossed the boundary. The hidden pills, the secret gambling, the shift from those places where we were just trying to conceal something to recognizing something was out of control. It is the places we have twisted truth or we've shifted blame or the tracks we covered up to protect ourselves, but we left someone else in the lurch. The friend you betrayed, the marriage you slowly stopped fighting for, the years you wasted, and the compromise that you justified. It is that weight of the exhausting double life where you wish that you could take something back and you do not even recognize how you got to that place, those moments, right? Those moments are not just about people out there somewhere. Those moments live here in this room. Those moments are part of your story, and they are a part of my story, and maybe as I was just walking through some of those moments, you felt that drop in your chest, because I named the one that

was a part of your story. I named your moment, your habit, your secret, and maybe part of you even thought, “Oh my gosh, does he know? Does he know that that is part of my story?” and I promise you, I do not. I just know the reality of the stories that so many of us live with, those moments that we wish we could have back, those moments that do not seem to go away, the moments that when things get quiet, they seem to resurface when we are alone or when the noise fades, and what happens with those moments in our lives is not just that we think about those moments. It is that those moments become a part of our identity. That is what shame does. It is those moments that we wish we could have back, that we can’t seem to, but they whisper to us not that, “Oh my gosh, I can’t believe you did that.” They whisper to us, “I can’t believe that that’s who you are,” and that shift between the action that you took, the boundary that you crossed, the line that you blew past, and the shame that settles into your heart and soul that says, “This is now the truest part of who you are,” the worst moments of our story.

The question today in the story we are looking at of the apostle Peter is, “What does Jesus do with our worst moments, those moments?” I think that is one of the reasons why this story in John 21 is such a gift. It is truly one of my favorite narratives in all of scripture, because what we see on the far side of Peter’s worst moment, his most public failure, his most bitter regret, is that Jesus does not abandon him. He comes looking for him and meets him in a place that is very familiar to Peter, and what we see about how Jesus interacts with Peter’s worst moment should give us confidence in how He reacts to our worst moment.

So, the story starts in John 21. We are going to pick it up in verse 3, where Peter is talking to his friends, and he says, “I am going out to fish,” Simon Peter told them, and they said, ‘Well, we will go with you.’ So, they went out and got into a boat, but that night they caught nothing.” Now, all of us who love to fish or have fished at any point in our life know that there is a difference between fishing and catching. They were doing some fishing and caught nothing, so they are finishing the night feeling like failures, feeling like they just spent their entire night trying to get anything, one fish. They caught not a single thing, but there is something more significant than that. Peter says this line, “I am going out to fish,” and that is more than Peter saying, “I was a disciple of Jesus, and now I am just going to go back to my previous career.” If you know Peter’s story, what is happening in this story is that Peter is reliving, and this is the logical conclusion to what has happened in his life over the last few weeks. There was a moment, a few weeks before this moment when Peter went back to fishing, when he was following Jesus into Jerusalem, and he knew following Jesus into Jerusalem meant there was going to be a confrontation that was going to take place. He knew that Jesus had made enough enemies because of the way that He had been going around and ministering to people and the gospel He had been proclaiming, the truth of the kingdom of God that He had shared, and so he knew that he was going to be stepping into Jerusalem and that a battle was coming.

So, he is starting to get ready for this moment, and as Jesus gathers his disciples for the Passover meal, He tells them that some of them will betray him that night, and Peter stands up and says, “Lord, I will never betray you. If all others, if the rest of these people leave you and abandon you, I will stay with you to prison or death. I am willing to go with you to the very end,” and so as they leave the Last Supper, and they go to the Garden of Gethsemane, and Jesus leads them out because He was wanting to pray and spend some time with the Lord, and Jesus begins to pray, and He asks Peter and a few others to stand

watch with Him, and Peter, who has just made this bold proclamation that he will stand by Jesus' side no matter what, he knows that they are going to a dangerous place, and so he straps a sword under his cloak. He is ready for the fight.

Jesus goes off, and he prays for a little bit, and as he is praying, Peter falls asleep, not once, not twice, but three different times, and Jesus comes to him just, this is one of the most intense moments of Jesus' life, and He is asking his closest friends to stand by Him, to stay up and stand guard and watch with him. Peter has just said, "I will go with you to prison or death. I am the soldier you want, the soldier you need," and then he is falling asleep on the job. Jesus comes to him after He has been sweating drops of blood because of the stress and anxiety He is under, knowing that torture and the crucifixion are coming for Him tomorrow, and He says, "Peter, can't you just stay awake with me for a little bit?" So, Peter probably is already feeling a little bit like a failure, and so in this moment, suddenly a mob approaches them as they are praying in the garden. This mob is coming with clubs and swords and torches, and they are coming to arrest Jesus, and you have to imagine at this moment that Peter thinks, "This is my chance. This is what we have been waiting for. This is the time that I stand up," and so he draws his sword, and as one of the chief priest servants comes to arrest Jesus, he draws his sword, and he hacks at him, and he chops off his ear, which means he is probably not a very good fighter. If you are just hitting an ear, you probably missed your target, and so he misses. You have got to imagine, I mean, he is, adrenaline is pumping, he is ready for the fight, he is engaging the enemy, and he is ready for people to charge with him. This is the battle that they have been waiting for, the moment Jesus takes over, but Jesus does not fight with him. He bends down, He picks up the ear, He places it on the mangled person's face, and He heals him, and then He rebukes Peter and says, "Enough of this. No more bloodshed. That is not what we are here to do," and you have to imagine that at that moment, it is pretty disorienting for Peter. He thought that this was the task that he had been given, and you have to imagine that it probably stopped him in his boots, sandals, at that moment. He did not wear boots. It stopped him in his tracks, because what is he supposed to do now? He was ready to fight. He told Jesus he would never abandon Him. He steps into the fight, and Jesus steps back and says, "What are you doing? That is not the plan," heals his enemy, and then is taken off and arrested.

So, Peter does not know quite what to do with this, so he follows Jesus. All of the other disciples abandon Him, except for John and Peter, and they all flee, but Peter and John, they follow at a distance, and they follow Jesus to the trial and the temple courts. We are given this detail by the apostle John, that it was a cold night, and that Peter warmed himself by a charcoal fire, and that as he was standing by this fire, or sitting by this fire, there is a group of people around who are waiting to hear what happens with this circus trial, and they begin to recognize Peter, and they know he has a different accent. He sounds a little bit like Jesus. He looks like a person who is following Jesus all week in Jerusalem, and so they ask him, "Hey, are you one of his disciples? Are you one of the people that have been following Him?" and Peter says, "No, absolutely not. I have never met this person before. I do not know who you are talking about," and then a little girl comes and says, "No, I think I saw you. I think I saw you," and maybe she saw him at the victory parade of Palm Sunday, or maybe she saw him as Jesus was going into the temple courts and turning the tables over. She saw him. She recognized him and said, "Are you sure you are not one of the people who is following Him? He says, "No, I have never heard of the man," and the third

person asks and says, “I really think that you have been following Him. I mean, you are a Galilean. He is a Galilean. Why else would you be here?” and he says, “You do not understand.” He actually gets violent in his response and says, “I have never met Him before,” and we are told in the gospel of Luke that at that exact moment, Jesus looks at Peter, the exact moment of his third denial, and the rooster crows, and suddenly Peter remembers that despite his bravado, despite his bragging, despite his courage, where he claimed he would go with Jesus to death and to prison, he has denied Him three times. It tells us that he, all gospels account for this moment, that as the rooster crowed and as Jesus looked at him in the eyes, he left weeping and ran from the temple courts. So that is Peter’s story, and so when he says, “I am going fishing,” that is the background. It is that he had been called to follow Jesus, and he had denied that call.

Here is the truth about Peter. It is that this is his worst moment. This is the moment that he wishes he could take back. He is going fishing because he is going back to what he understands, what he knows, because he feels like such a failure at this moment, that there is nothing he could do to earn his way back into the position he had once held, and that is what happens to so many of us. Once failure exposes us, we are tempted to run back to whatever feels safe. So, Peter goes back to what he knows, fishing. The same is true of us. In our worst moments, we are so tempted to go back to what we know, to go back to what feels comfortable and safe to us. We go back to old habits that numb us.

Some of us go back to overworking, because achievement feels easier than vulnerability. Sometimes we go back to managing our image, because confession feels too costly. We just find something that can distract us, and so we go to an addiction or scrolling or lust, and we just go back to the noise that can silence the shame within us. That is Peter at this moment, and underneath all of this moment is a heart that says, “I will go where I do not have to face what is broken within me. I am just going to run away,” and that is Peter at this moment. That is how he decides to handle his worst moment. “I will just go fishing, because that is what I know, and that is what is easy, and that is what feels safe to me.” What Peter does not know is that Jesus is going to meet him exactly in that space.

So, Peter and his friends went fishing that night. They do not catch anything, and as the sun begins to rise the next morning, and they have been out fishing all night, they are exhausted, they are worn out, they start rowing into shore, when they see a person standing on the beach, and this person calls out to them and says, “Hey friends, have you caught anything?” and I love the way the gospels account for this, because all of the disciples, the only thing they say is “no,” because if you are a fisherman, and you do not catch anything, there is no story to tell. If you catch some stuff, you have some good stories to tell, but if you do not catch anything, it is just “no.” You are frustrated, you are angry, and you are tired. It feels like it was a waste of time. “Why do I do this?” They just say “no,” and Jesus then calls out. They do not recognize that it is Jesus, but He calls out to them. He says, “Well, why don’t you try putting your nets on the other side?” Which if you know at all how water works, and you are in a boat, and someone is like, “Hey, watch out for that side over there. There are sharks in the water. Go to the other side of the boat,” it does not matter. It is all water. Fish move. Sharks move. Like all of it isn’t. It does not make any sense, just throwing the net on the other side, but they listen.

They throw the net on the other side of the boat, and suddenly they catch this miraculous catch of fish. It feels overwhelming. They can’t even draw the net in. They are afraid the nets are going to break, and one of the disciples, they recognized in this moment, and something about this moment is like a de ja

vu. It takes them back to a place, and so we are told in John 21:7, “Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, ‘It is the Lord,’ and as soon as Simon Peter heard him say, ‘It is the Lord,’ he wrapped his outer garment around him, for he had taken it off.” It is a really weird detail. Apparently, he was fishing half naked, and he decided to put his clothes on and then jump into the water. I do not really understand that. I do not know the significance of it, but this is why this moment matters. It is because in Luke chapter 5, the exact same story happens. The disciples and Peter have been out fishing all night. Jesus comes to them, and He says, “Hey, can you take me in your boat? I want to teach from your boat,” and so they go out into the boat, and they are exhausted. They have not caught anything all night, and Jesus says, “Hey, have you tried the other side?” and they are like, again, “That does not make sense. That doesn’t make a difference,” but they throw the nets on the other side, and they catch a haul of fish that is so big that it begins to break the nets. What we are told in that moment is that Peter falls to his knees in the boat and says, “My Lord, away from me, for I am a sinner.” I am a sinner, and I cannot even be in your presence.

It is like that Isaiah 6 moment, where he is so overwhelmed by the glory and the holiness of God that he recognizes, “I have no place here. I have no ability to stand in any kind of presence with someone so holy, so powerful, so perfect, so just get away from me,” which is a really funny thing to say to someone when you are in a boat. Like, where is Jesus supposed to go? There was nowhere to go, but he says, “I cannot even be around you,” and that is the moment that Jesus calls Peter to follow Him, and He says, “You no longer are going to be a fisherman. You are going to become a fisher of men and follow me,” and so I think what is happening in this moment in John is that Jesus is intentionally trying to draw Peter back to that first moment. He is essentially resetting the relationship. He is saying, “Hey, do you remember where we started? Do you remember where we began, where you thought you could not even be in my presence, and where you had no idea what you were doing? You had failed at life. You were not catching anything, and you were a fisherman. Let’s go back to that moment and reset. Let’s start our relationship there, despite what has transpired over the last few weeks. Let’s go back to the beginning, where I first called you to follow me,” but notice the difference in Peter’s response.

In the first story, he falls on his knees and says, “I am not even worthy to be around you.” His reaction here is completely different. He puts on his clothes and then jumps into the water and swims ashore, leaving all of his friends to deal with all of the fish and rowing the boat by themselves. He cannot wait to get back to Jesus, and if you know anything about what would be happening in this story, you might think that it would be the exact opposite reaction. He has known that he has betrayed Jesus. You would think that he would hang back, that he would stay at the back of the boat and be like, “All right, I guess there is nowhere else for us to go. Let’s go back and see what Jesus has to say,” but there is no hesitation. Why the difference? Why one moment at the beginning does he feel afraid of encountering Jesus, and then in this story, when he has had the worst moment of his life, does he jump into the water and say, “Oh my goodness, I just cannot wait to get back at the feet of Jesus”? What is the difference?

I think it is time. I think Peter has seen over the last number of years of following Jesus that even though he is coming off of his worst moment, even though he knows that he is a sinner, even though he knows he has betrayed Him, he has watched Jesus welcome sinners just like him time and time again, tax collectors, lepers. He has defended the ashamed. He has restored the broken. Jesus has forgiven his enemies, and He has gone to the cross. What Peter has learned in his time of following Jesus is that the

holiness of Jesus does not move away from sinners in disgust, but that it moves toward them in mercy, and so I think Peter in this moment is not swimming towards Jesus because he suddenly feels good about himself or he feels like he is no longer a sinner. He is coming off his worst moment, his worst failure. He has denied Jesus three times publicly. His confidence in this moment is not in himself. It is in who Jesus is. He knows he has nowhere else to go.

I think what Peter recognizes throughout his story and one of the things that we should recognize about our own stories is that one of the deepest marks of understanding grace, when you truly understand the depth of God's grace for you in your worst moment and your sin, it is that God does not move away from those moments, that grace actually draws us in. When we really understand grace, and we recognize our worst moment, if we really understand grace, we do not hide from God. We run to Him, because we know that that is the only place we should go, which is the opposite reaction to what so many of us have. We have our worst moment. We have the thing we wish we could take back, and we think at that moment, "The last place I can go is to church. If I go to church, I will get burned up. If I go into the presence of God, He will destroy me. How could He love me? How could He accept me?" but Peter has learned the alternative reality that grace runs to us.

So, what is your response to failure, to your worst moment with Jesus? Do you run and hide from Jesus, or do you understand grace deeply enough to stop hiding and to run to Him? So, Peter runs to Jesus, and he meets Him at the shore, and he gets there, and I think he sees something that would have stopped him in his tracks, because what we are told is that when they landed, and when they got to the shore, they saw a fire of coals burning, and there were some fish on it and some bread. Now what you need to know is that this line for a fire of burning coals, there are two places in the entire Bible where that particular word for fire is used. Do you know where they are? They are in this story and John 18, when Peter warmed himself by a fire as he denied Jesus. It is as if John is trying to paint this picture, and I think what Jesus is doing in this moment is Peter is walking up. It is the exact same type of fire that Peter denied Him by, and Jesus is there reminding him, this is the fire where it happened. He takes him right back to the worst moment, to the moment of shame, of failure, of regret, the moment he wishes he could take back, and Jesus says, "Here is a fire. Let's go back to that moment." The question is, what will He do to Peter at that place? Will He confront him? Will He shame him? Will He fill him with more regret? Will He point out, "I told you, I told you that you were going to deny me, and you did." What does He do? We are told in verse 12, Jesus simply said to him, "Come and have breakfast with me."

Can you imagine that moment breakfast on the beach with Jesus? I would probably give anything to have been one of the people that got to sit next to Jesus as the sun was rising, the waves were lapping on the shore, and Jesus just sits down with his friends around a fire to enjoy a meal together, and I wonder what the ambiance of that moment would have been. I wonder if it would have been laughter and like, "Can you believe everything that has happened?" I wonder if it would have been solemn, just that quiet content. I wonder if it would have been what usually happens when I sit around a fire with a bunch of my friends, and we just look at it, and they are like, "That is amazing," and we do not talk at all. What would that have been like? I think the bigger point here is that Jesus feeds Peter before He confronts him. Jesus feeds Peter before He says a word about his failure. He makes breakfast for the man who denied Him, which means grace is already at work before the hard conversation even begins.

So, I think what that means for us in our worst moments is it means our worst moments are not the end of our story with Jesus. They are the beginning of the next conversation. They are beginning of the next place Jesus wants to encounter us. He does not meet us with humiliation, but with mercy, and Jesus is absolutely honest about this, and He is not sugarcoating. He is taking Peter back to the exact moment that would flood his memory with the sight and the smell and the sounds of the denial, but it is at that moment that He comes near, and He feeds Peter, He restores us, and He shows us that grace is greater than our worst failure. That means the moment that you lost control with your kids, the moment when you went too far, the moment when you drank too much or used more than you intended to, the moment when you stopped fighting for your marriage, the moment that you failed in the dark, and the moment that you failed in public. Jesus does not excuse that moment. He does not simply let it go, but He does not let it have the final word. He comes to us in those worst moments with truth and with mercy and with nail-scarred hands, and He says, “Can you just have breakfast with me?”

Then it goes on. They had finished eating, and in verse 15 we are told this: “When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?’” “Do you love me more than these?” It is a little abstract, isn’t it? More than what? What is He talking about? There are some scholars that think that in this question, that Jesus is asking Peter, “Do you love me more than these nets and these boats?” and He said, “You went back to fishing. Do you love me?” but we know that Peter did not really like fishing. He was not any good at it, clearly, so what is He asking him?

I think from the context of the story and the language that is used, what Jesus is actually asking Peter in this moment is He is looking at the group of disciples around, and He is saying, “Peter, do you still think that you love me more than these men do, more than these disciples do?” He is taking Peter back to the last meal that they had together, the last supper, where all of the other disciples did not stand up. None of them stood up to say, “I will follow you to the end.” Peter makes this brave, courageous statement where he says, “Even if they all fall away, I love you more than they do. I will go with you to the end,” and Jesus is calling him back to that place, bringing him a slice of humble pie, saying, “Do you still believe that you are better than the rest? Do you still believe that you love me more than all of these people do, or do you finally understand who you actually are?”

Peter had worked his whole life to build this identity around being the most devoted, the strongest, the one who will never fail, and Jesus is not just addressing Peter’s failure in denying him. He is also addressing the self-confidence that Peter lived with that made him say, “I can do anything for you.” Jesus always is interested not in the behavior. We like to boil Christianity down to like dealing with the behavior, but Jesus is always interested in not the worst moment of our life, but what lies beneath the worst moment of our life, the moment that caused the moment. What lies beneath the surface, that sin, that thing that you wish you could take back. Is it fear? Is it pride? Is it a hunger to be seen or chosen or to be enough? Maybe it is a wound you have been carrying for years, something that has happened to you. Maybe it is the lie that you have to prove yourself, protect yourself, satisfy yourself, or save yourself, and Jesus wants to get at that moment, not just the behavior, but the thing that lies beneath the moment that it all fell apart. So, He is calling Peter back to that moment, and He is saying, “Do you still think you are who you claim to be, or do you understand now who you really are and who I am?”

So, they get up, and they go for a walk, and we are told that He asked him a second time, “Do you love me?” and Peter responded, “You know that I love you,” and He said, “Then feed my sheep,” take care of my flock. Then in verse 17, we are told a third time that He came to Peter as they were walking on the shore at sunrise and said, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” and Peter was hurt because Jesus had asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” Again, Jesus is taking him back to the place of his denial, and Peter hurt. He responds in this way, “Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you,” and so Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.”

What I love about this scene is that in the end, Jesus did not ask Peter, “What have you done for me?” He does not ask him, “What have you done to restore or repair or fix what you broke?” He does not even ask Peter to explain himself. He does not ask him, “Have you learned your lesson?” That is what I ask when my kids screw up. “Did you get it?” “Did you understand?” Like, “This is why you should have listened to me.” Jesus does not say any of that. He is not saying, “Are you more impressive now? Are you stronger now? Are you finally over your issues now?” He asks them one simple question. “Do you love me?” That is the question beneath all other questions, not, “How bad was your failure?” not, “Can you fix what you broke?” not, “Have you become better than other people?” or “Have you become a better version of yourself?” “Can you promise me that you will never do it again?”

That is what we often do. We fall back into the pattern, the habit, the sin, the thing that keeps us in our worst failure. We think, “Never again. I will never do that again,” and then we fall into it. Jesus does not ask any of that. He simply says, “Do you love me?” because I think Jesus knows something that we often forget. Transformation does not grow out of shame. It can only grow out of love. The Christian life is not about proving yourself after your worst moment. It is about returning your heart to the one who has loved you all along, despite your worst moment. I think what Jesus is saying to Peter in this moment is not, “Convince me that we are okay,” but He is saying, “Peter, beneath all that bravado, underneath all of that failure, underneath all of that grief and shame and regret, underneath your worst moment, is your heart still mine? Are you still willing to follow me?”

I think that is the question before us today, that this story, this unlikely encounter prompts in us. Have you messed up? We already know the answer to that. Do you have regrets? Of course you do. We all do. Are there things that you wish you could take back? Absolutely. The question in the middle of all of that is, “Do you love Jesus, even if your love feels small, even if your love feels shaky at times, even if all you can say is, ‘Lord, I do not even know, but you know all things’?” In the kingdom of Jesus, your worst moment is not the moment that matters most. Your failure is absolutely real, but it is never final. The question that matters most is not whether or not you have fallen. We have all fallen short of the glory of God, but it is whether in the ruins of what you have done, you still turn towards Jesus and say, “Lord, you know that I love you. You know that I love you,” and Jesus finishes that story by telling Peter, “Well then, follow me.” He takes him right back to the moment they met and says, “You can still follow me.” The final word over your life is not your worst moment. It is the defining characteristic of what Jesus says about your life. It is the voice of Jesus still calling your name, still asking for your love, and still inviting you to walk with Him and follow Him.

So, what do you do with your worst moment? I think you look at this story and what Jesus does with worst moments, and you recognize it is nothing you have to fix, it is nothing you could ever fix, and

you simply turn to Him, and all He is asking you is the question, “Do you love me? Is your heart still mine? Will you still follow me, despite the worst moment? It is because I have not given up on you.” The question is whether or not we believe that, not whether or not it is true, because that is what Jesus says, but do you believe that about your story and your worst moment, that Jesus could look at that, the place that you want to take back, and say, “Hey, I know, but do you still love me?”

We are going to transition into a time of baptism, which essentially is that moment of saying “yes” to Jesus. “I still love you. I still give my heart to you. I still give myself to you.” Baptism is the moment when we step out of hiding, and we tell the truth. “I have failed. I need grace, but I belong to Jesus.” In a moment, you are going to hear some stories, some real stories from people in this church whose lives have been met by the grace of Jesus. None of them are perfect. They are not people who have never had a worst moment. They are people who know what it is to fail, to wander, to hide, and to ache, and they found Jesus meeting them there, and here is an invitation for you. If today, as you listen to these stories, as you listen to the story of Peter, maybe something of the Spirit of God is stirring within you, and maybe for some of you, this will be not just their story, but your story. It will be your moment too, where you stop hiding from your worst moment, and you step into the moment of not letting shame write your story anymore but letting Jesus write your story, to simply come forward to be baptized and say, “Jesus, I love you. I want to follow you,” so take a look at these stories of how Jesus has worked.

Video: “The way that Jesus has changed everything for me was just continuous peace. So regardless of everything going on in my life, I know that I am going to be all right. There is comfort in Jesus for sure that I did not have before.”

“Yeah, the connector show that I went to just last weekend with my Bridge group, we just did a lot of stuff, and we were doing some silent time where we were sitting on a bench listening to somebody play the guitar, and it was like I heard and saw Jesus in the stars.”

“Baptism to me means following in Him more and knowing that He is God and that I am firmly in his dance step, because I have been really on the middle, like I am not sure if I believe in Jesus or not, because I had a lot of encounters where I do not think He is real. We could talk science and stuff, but there is also other stuff that made me believe in Him, because like we have just been doing a whole bunch of stuff in church that has made me believe in Jesus even more.”

“I did not grow up with religion at all, so my grandparents were religious. My parents did not raise me in the church at all, so I did not get to know God until I went to college. I met some of my friends who I am still very close with today that helped me grow in that space all the time, but yeah, so probably about ten years ago, I came to know God, and we have been getting to know each other ever since.”

“Yeah, I started The Bridge. It is a youth group. I am going to learn about God and praise Him and worship Him, and then I started going to more things, and it just pulled me so much closer to Him, and I just feel like now is a good time.”

“I had a meeting with Paul where I just asked him about a whole bunch of stuff, and I got a lot of my biggest questions like about if I think Jesus is male or not. It was probably half a year maybe until I decided to get baptized, and every single time it was like, “If anybody else wants to get baptized after the video,” I was just like, “Not yet, not yet, but,” and then I finally had the decision of the lake or here, and I chose here.”

“I thought about this a lot too, because a lot of my closest friends are Christians, but then I also have family and friends that are not Christians, and it is just a symbol of how important He is to me and how important He is in my life, and I know my family and friends, if they are here, they would say that they can see a change in me. I know they would say that, so I think just giving them that why and showing his love through my journey and my life is what I am to do with that.”

“There is a song we sing in my outside school choir. It is called Amani Utupe. That means, ‘Grant us peace, give us courage,’ and I feel like he puts that song into my head so many times.’

43:02 minutes

Edited by Tom Kenaston

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